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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the outcomes of a study that compared the attitudes of 245 parents of preschoolers with and without disabilities and 121 preschool service providers. It was designed to assess global attitudes toward inclusion, benefits and concerns regarding inclusion for children with disabilities, the impact of inclusion on children without disabilities, the impact on families, the importance of type and severity of disability and children's age on attitudes toward inclusion, and program involvement and satisfaction. Results identified a high degree of support for inclusion among parents of children with and without disabilities, with few significant differences found in their opinions. Support among preschool service providers was even stronger. Respondents also reported concerns about inclusion, with parents indicating greater concerns than school staff. Both parents and school staff were less likely to support inclusion for children with severe disabilities or those with emotional and/or behavioral problems, relating this lack of support to the program's ability to adequately address their needs. Respondents also identified a number of benefits of inclusion for families of preschoolers with disabilities. Finally, most of the parents were "very satisfied" with their child's preschool inclusion program, the quality of the teachers, and the availability of related services. (CR)

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Inclusive Education for Preschoolers with Disabilities:

Comparative Views of Parents and Practitioners

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Abstract

This presentation highlights findings from an identical survey involving 245 parents of preschoolers with and without disabilities and 121 preschool service providers. It was designed to assess:

- Global attitudes toward inclusion
- Benefits/concerns about inclusion for children with disabilities
- Impact of inclusion on children without disabilities
- Impact on families
- Importance of type/severity of disability and children's age
- Program involvement and satisfaction

Analyses compared the responses of parents of children with and without disabilities and school staff. There was strong support for inclusion among groups with few significant differences found in their opinions. Major concerns focused on the quality of the preschool program and the type and severity of the children's disabilities.

Demographic Characteristics of the Parents' Children

	%	N
Gender (n=242)		
Male	72%	174
Female	28%	68
Developmental Profile (n=244)		
Disabled	68%	166
Non-Disabled	32%	78
Severity of Disability (n=156)		
Mild	55%	85
Moderate	37%	57
Severe	9%	14
Type of Disability (n=159)		
Speech/Language Impaired	55%	87
Behavior/Emotional	12%	19
Autistic	9%	14
Multiply Disabled	6%	9
Visually Impaired	3%	4
Physically Challenged	3%	5
Hearing Impaired	2%	3
Other	11%	18
Program Services (n=237)		
Half-Day	72%	171
Full-Day	28%	66

Demographic Characteristics of the School Staff

	%	N
Gender (n=118)		
Female	98%	115
Male	2%	3
Educational Level (n=119)		
BOCES/AAS	2%	3
High School Graduate	12%	14
Some College	15%	18
College Graduate	13%	15
Some Postgraduate	6%	7
Masters Degree	45%	54
Doctoral Degree	7%	8
Job Title (n=121)		
Teacher Assistant	29%	35
Special Education Teacher	27%	33
Speech Therapist	15%	18
Occupational Therapist	8%	10
Early Childhood Teacher	7%	8
Psychologist	7%	8
Physical Therapist	2%	3
Social Worker	2%	3
Administrative	1%	1
Audiology	1%	1
Nursing	1%	1
Age (n=109)	16 to 55 years, 31 years average	
Years of Work Experience (n=112)	1 to 30 years, 10 years average	
Years at Program (n=118)	1 to 16 years, 5 years average	

Global Attitudes Toward Inclusion*

	Parents % Agree	Providers % Agree
Parents of children with and without disabilities both held positive global attitudes toward inclusion:		
CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES SHOULD...		
Have their pictures in school publications	91%	98%
Share special events with non-disabled children	90%	98%
Eat lunch in the school cafeteria at the same time	85%	95%
Go on school field trips with non-disabled children	85%	97%
Use the same bathroom with non-disabled children	84%	91%
Have their classrooms located throughout the school	83%	92%
Share classes with non-disabled children	83%	95%
Share the same school jobs and responsibilities	83%	88%
Share recess with non-disabled children	81%	96%
Use school hallways at the same time	78%	93%
Eat lunch at the same cafeteria tables	76%	95%
Ride the same school bus as non-disabled children	63%	73%

*No between group differences among parents of children with and without disabilities.

Benefits for Children with Disabilities*

	Parents % Agree	Providers % Agree
There was a <u>strong</u> degree of agreement that inclusion would have a positive impact on children with disabilities:		
Inclusion promotes acceptance of children with disabilities by the community	86%	85%
They are more likely to develop independence in self-help skills	85%	82%
They will have more chances to participate in a variety of activities	82%	85%
They will become prepared to function effectively in the real world	82%	88%
They will learn more by seeing typically developing children	81%	85%
They will be more likely to want to try harder	67%	68%
They will be more likely to feel better about themselves	62%	58%

*No between group differences among parents of children with and without disabilities.

Concerns for Children with Disabilities*

	Parents % Agree	Providers % Agree
There was a <u>low</u> degree of concern that inclusion would have a negative impact on children with disabilities:		
They will be taught by unqualified teachers	36%	20%
They will not receive enough special help and individualized attention from teachers	36%	20%
They will not receive enough special services	26%	9%
They will be rejected or left out by teachers	15%	5%
They will be rejected or left out by other children	25%	10%
There will be a negative effect on their emotional development	17%	8%

*No between group differences among parents of children with and without disabilities.

Benefits for Typically Developing Children*

	Parents % Agree	Providers % Agree
There was a strong degree of agreement that inclusion would have a positive impact on typically developing children:		
They will learn to develop sensitivity to others	91%	94%
They will better understand and accept differences in people	87%	92%
They will become more aware and accepting of their own strengths and weaknesses	74%	77%
They will benefit overall	71%	81%

*No between group differences among parents of children with and without disabilities.

Concerns for Typically Developing Children*

	Parents % Agree	Providers % Agree
There was a moderate degree of concern that inclusion would have a negative impact on typically developing children:		
They may be frightened by strange behavior of some children	59%	48%
They may be injured by children with disabilities	29%	20%
They may copy and learn negative behaviors from children with disabilities	28%	23%
They may present with behavior problems	24%	12%
It is difficult to maintain order in an integrated classroom	15%	10%
They will be overlooked because children with disabilities are so demanding	32%	14%
They will not receive enough attention	23%	9%
They will be held back or their learning will be slowed down by children with disabilities	19%	12%
They will not get their fair share of resources	13%	3%
They will not receive adequate teacher instruction	10%	10%

*No between group differences among parents of children with and without disabilities.

Impact on Families of Children with Disabilities*

	Parents % Agree	Providers % Agree
There was a strong degree of agreement that inclusion would have a positive impact on families of children with disabilities:		
BENEFITS		
Gives them more of a chance to interact with families of typically developing children	74%	80%
Helps them learn more about typical child development	63%	75%
DRAWBACKS		
They will be upset by seeing their child rejected or teased	52%	31%
They will feel that most other families do not share or understand their concerns	45%	38%
They will be upset by differences between their child and typically developing children	31%	29%
They will feel left out or ignored by families of typically developing children	26%	14%

*No between group differences among parents of children with and without disabilities.

Impact on Families of Typically Developing Children

	Parents % Agree	Providers % Agree
There was a <u>strong</u> degree of agreement that inclusion would have a positive impact on families of typically developing children:		
BENEFITS		
They will understand what it is like for families with disabled children	70%*	66%
They will understand children with disabilities	70%*	75%
DRAWBACKS		
They will feel uncomfortable being around children with disabilities	26%	15%
They will feel uncomfortable being around families of children with disabilities	19%	15%

*Families of typically developing children were more likely to agree than families of children with disabilities.

Attitudes Toward Inclusion by Type and Severity of Disability and Age of Child

	Parents % Agree	Providers % Agree
Type of Disability		
Speech Impaired	87%	97%
Orthopedically Impaired	79%	94%
Visually Impaired	78%	92%
Hearing Impaired	78%	93%
Learning Disabled	76%	84%
Other Health Impaired	66%	75%
Deaf	72%	79%
Autistic	41%	46%
Mentally Challenged	35%	50%
Emotionally Disturbed	26%	44%
Severity of Disability		
Mild	89%*	97%
Moderate	69%	85%
Severe	22%	24%
Age of Child		
Preschool-age Children	80%	90%
Elementary School Students	81%	91%
Middle School Students	73%	81%
High School Students	73%	80%

*Support was higher among parents of children with disabilities than parents of typically developing children.

Parents' Satisfaction with Preschool Program

	% Satisfied
SATISFACTION WITH PROGRAM	
Overall program quality	85%
Teachers are adequately trained	83%
Amount of contact with teacher	83%
Quality of instruction	77%
Availability of instructional materials	72%*
SATISFACTION WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION	
Adequacy of speech/language services	84%
Adequacy of PT/OT services	81%
Development of Individualized Education Program	67%
Would place child into an integrated program again	94%

* Parents of children with disabilities were more satisfied with the availability of instructional materials than parents of typically developing children.

Parents' Involvement in Preschool Program

	% Very Much
INVOLVEMENT IN PRESCHOOL PROGRAM	
Contact with teacher	89%
The transition into the preschool program	87%
Overall involvement in child's educational program	86%*
Educational activities at home	84%*
Observations at school	69%
School activities	52%
INVOLVEMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION	
The assessment/evaluation process	90%
The placement decision	90%
Barriers to Program Involvement	
Job/work schedule	44%
Time of meetings	38%
No babysitter	31%
No transportation	15%
Not interested	9%
Feel unwelcome by the staff	3%
Other	8%

* Parents of children with disabilities were more involved in overall educational program and activities at home than parents of typically developing children.

Discussion

This study identified a high degree of support for inclusion among parents of children with and without disabilities, with few significant differences found in their opinions. Support among preschool service providers was even stronger. Respondents also reported concerns about inclusion, with parents indicating greater concerns than school staff. Both parents and school staff were less likely to support inclusion for children with severe disabilities or those with emotional and/or behavioral problems, relating this lack of support to the program's ability to adequately address their needs. Respondents also identified a number of benefits of inclusion for families of preschoolers with disabilities. Finally, most of the parents were "very satisfied" with their child's preschool inclusion program, the quality of their child's teacher, and the availability of related services. In addition, almost all of the parents indicated that they would place their child into an integrated classroom again. Findings were supported by handwritten comments throughout the surveys, which cautioned that attitudes toward inclusion varied according to the quality of the preschool program and that a quality program may mitigate parents' concerns about inclusion.